

Poet Robert Lowell Lived in Duxbury

By BOBBIE CUTLER

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In Ian Hamilton's definitive and fascinating biography of double Pulitzer prize winner Robert Lowell, Duxbury is mentioned several times. In September, 1954, the Lowells bought a house in Duxbury, "near Plymouth and an agreeable 40 miles from Boston." Lowell's mother, Charlotte, lived in Boston and Lowell's wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, spoke of her as "impossible." The Duxbury house, at 88 Surplus St., is the present home of Mr. and Mrs. John Clark. Lowell writes of it, "It is in a section heavy with Pilgrim history and monuments and immortalized by Longfellow, but charming with a 3 (sic) mile beach...the house was built in 1740 and has a 1950 furnace." The house had 3 acres of land, and Lowell looked forward to being "Mr. Lowell of Duxbury." Roof repairs were needed and the house would not be ready for living in until spring. "Even Charlotte Lowell considered it had 'possibilities,' though according to Hardwick, 'she seems in doubt that we, two middle-aged enfants, will realize them.'"

The summer of 1955, Lowell and Hardwick spent part of the summer in Duxbury and part in Castine, Me. After Charlotte died "part of the point of Duxbury had been its safe distance from Lowell's mother. They were now free to live anywhere they pleased."

In the early stages of his Cincinnati illness (one of many mental illnesses), he had tried to sabotage Duxbury by "sending abusive letters to the woman who was handling the interior decoration." (Was this the late Bobbie Wadsworth Spring?)

One of my memories of Lowell and Elizabeth was at a typical Duxbury gathering. Hardwick had asked for another drink and the host obliged. Lowell then said in a rough voice, "You've had enough." Elizabeth said, "I'll drink as much as I want." Then he glared at her and she ignored him. John was deep in conversation with her at the time. Reading Hamilton's biography and remembering this remark made me wonder, as Lowell was given to excessive drinking and on one occasion consumed 6 double martinis before lunch.

I often saw Lowell at St. John's Church, although I don't believe Hardwick accompanied him. Brought up an Episcopalian, he for a time became a Roman Catholic, but later was welcomed back to the Episcopal church by Bishop Nash.